

S.J. No. 43 (COMM) RESOLUTION AMENDING THE STATE CONSTITUTION
CONCERNING VOTING BY ABSENTEE BALLOT.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Gail Lehmann of 638-9 Danbury Road, Ridgefield CT 06877 (203-438-7755) before the Government Administration and Elections Committee on February 18, 2009.

This issue came to the forefront in the 2008 Presidential election when it became evident that 31 states had more voting options than Connecticut. The variety of options included early voting polling places, mail-in, and "no excuse absentee ballots".

Connecticut could benefit and learn from the positive experiences that other states have had in trying to resolve on-going issues of voter participation and apathy. We can be a leader in Civic Education and Engagement for our young people by demonstrating our willingness to make participation a goal for all our citizens.

"No excuse absentee ballots" are important for both national and municipal elections. In Ridgefield, the Town Clerk's office reported the following statistics for a variety of elections:

Nov '08-Presidential Election-86% turnout (2000 absentee ballots)

May '08-Budget Referendum- 19% voter turnout (100 absentee ballots)

May'07-Municipal Election-38% voter turnout (261 absentee ballots)

In closing, I believe that "no excuse absentee ballots" could be implemented with a minimum of financial burden to the municipalities. It could reduce the current barriers of long lines in larger cities (like the 1.5 hours wait in Norwalk during the '08 Presidential election), accommodate work and commuter schedules, elderly citizens who find it difficult to get to the polling places and avoid voting machine breakdowns and malfunctions (like District #1 in Ridgefield during '08 Presidential election).

Upon completing my testimony, I was asked two questions by the Chairman of the Committee:

#1. Was I testifying on behalf of the Ridgefield Democratic Committee (DTC)? My response was that I had discussed the variety of "early voting" options with the DTC and the only one that they considered a viable option was "no excuse absentee voting". However, I was testifying on behalf of myself and not representing the DTC.

#2. Were there a lot of commuters in Ridgefield? I responded that I did not know the how many voters were commuters, but I did think that "no excuse absentee ballots" could be a value to Ridgefield commuters?